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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 USUN NEW YORK 000469

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 06/10/2017  
TAGS: AF AU ER EU PGOV PREL UNSC KPKO ET  
SUBJECT: ERITREA-ETHIOPIA BORDER IMPASSE: DEMARCHE RESPONSE

REF: SECSTATE 076306

Classified By: POLITICAL MINISTER-COUNSELOR WILLIAM BRENCICK FOR REASON  
S 1.4 (B,D)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY. Per reftel instructions, PolMinCouns and Poloff discussed the Eritrea-Ethiopia border impasse with Norwegian Deputy Permanent Representative Juul in the run-up to the November 27 deadline for demarcation by coordinates as imposed by the Eritrea-Ethiopia Boundary Commission (EEBC). PolMinCouns stressed that the entire process in Ethiopia and Eritrea was timeline-driven: the expiration of the mandate of the United Nations Mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea (UNMEE) in July and the departure of the EEBC in November. PolMinCouns acknowledged the negative impact the situation in Somalia had on the situation between Ethiopia and Eritrea and the obstacles it presented for U.S. mediation. PolMinCouns raised the possibility of a Friends of UNMEE meeting (a group which Norway chairs) by the end of June. Poloff also spoke with UKUN on June 8 on this topic, and that Mission had little new to offer. Finally, the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations updated the Security Council at June 11 consultations, saying that despite appearances, the parties still maintained "two fundamentally irreconcilable positions." END SUMMARY.

JOHANSON-ISAIAS MEETING WAS NO BREAKTHROUGH

¶2. (C) PolMinCouns and Poloff presented reftel demarche on June 5 to Norwegian Deputy PermRep Mona Juul, Military Advisor Arve Lauritzen and Political Counselor Berit Enge. Juul reported on a meeting between Norwegian Minister of State Raymond Johanson and Eritrean President Isaias in Asmara on May 30, which she described as a "frank, open discussion," which nevertheless revealed that "not much had changed" on Isaias' part. Johanson and Isaias had spoken about "virtual demarcation" of the border, but Isaias had insisted that there be "stakes in the ground" before any dialogue with Ethiopia could begin. Juul said that Johanson's arguments for an economic normalization of relations between Ethiopia and Eritrea had not resonated with Isaias.

¶3. (C) PolMinCouns asked if Isaias had given any indication

of Eritrean intentions if demarcation by coordinates were to take place upon the EEBC's scheduled departure in November, stressing that a major U.S. concern was what would happen after November. Juul said Isaias had downplayed any threat of war and had blamed the escalation of tensions squarely on Ethiopia.

#### UNMEE'S MANDATE COULD BE AFFECTED

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¶4. (C) Military Advisor Arve Lauritzen said Norway believed that, per the EEBC's November 2006 decision, demarcation by coordinates meant the dissolution of the Temporary Security Zone (TSZ) and accordingly the end of UNMEE's mandate. He advised that the mandate be changed to reflect this reality during its July renewal. PolMinCouns suggested that UNMEE's mandate be extended past November to prepare for any eventuality (NOTE: UKUN Poloff Justin McKenzie Smith told Poloff separately that London would support a six-month rollover for UNMEE while the Friends of UNMEE inaugurated a dialogue with concerned parties. END NOTE). Lauritzen noted that continued Eritrean restrictions on UNMEE's freedom of movement (which DPR Juul remarked had come to be a "normal" state of relations between the Eritrean Government and the international community and would remain so until events changed on the ground) sent a bad signal to Sudan and Chad, as the restrictions indicated an abuse of UN authority which did not bode well for potential UN operations in Darfur and eastern Chad. Lauritzen said that UNMEE at the moment was militarily paralyzed.

¶5. (C) Counselor Enge stated that UN involvement in the region was crucial and reported the reluctance among members

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of the Friends of UNMEE to further downsize the Mission under the present circumstances. McKenzie Smith later said London could see no way for UNMEE to be used as anything other than a tripwire in the standoff between the sides. PolMinCouns asserted that the issue should be highlighted on the Security Council's Mission to Africa so that the African Union (AU) could "get back in the business of conflict prevention." Enge agreed that the AU's location in Addis Ababa was an obstacle to true Eritrean cooperation.

¶6. (C) DPR Juul referred to a recent draft letter the Norwegian Mission had written on behalf of the Friends of UNMEE to the UN Secretary-General, urging him to act immediately on the appointment of a new Special Representative for UNMEE (NOTE: Just before the meeting, USUN had confirmed its support as a co-sponsor of this letter. END NOTE). Juul admitted the SRSG appointment would succeed only if accompanied by demonstrable political will by the parties but indicated Norway's intention to "do what could be done" in the meantime. UKUN Poloff agreed that the SYG should appoint a new SRSG as soon as possible. In later Council consultations, DPKO Assistant-SYG Annabi reported that interviews of SRSG candidates were ongoing and that the process would be completed soon.

#### RECEPTIVE TO FRIENDS MEETING

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¶7. (C) DPR Juul was receptive to the idea of a Friends of UNMEE meeting at the end of June, despite the fact that a previous meeting had been just over a month ago. She was open to the idea of inviting a high-level European Union representative to brief the group. Enge asked if AF/E Officer William Schofield were still planning to travel in the near future to both Asmara and Addis Ababa, and she requested that he raise revitalization of the Military Coordination Commission during his Addis stop. Lauritzen inquired about USG efforts to pressure the Ethiopian Government to accept without preconditions the EEBC decision. PolMinCouns said we were trying to impress upon the Ethiopian Government the need to live up to its international obligations.

¶8. (C) UKUN Poloff McKenzie Smith suggested that the Witnesses to the Algiers Agreement meet in June to issue a public statement encouraging the EEBC's findings. However, he considered the EEBC's November deadline to be unhelpful and worthy of re-evaluation. McKenzie Smith did not think that any mention of sanctions against either side would be productive.

DPKO NOT OPTIMISTIC ABOUT PROGRESS

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¶9. (C) At June 11 Security Council consultations, DPKO Assistant-SYG Annabi reported that the security situation remained tense and that Eritrea's 45 "permanent" restrictions against UNMEE (i.e., intact for at least six months) remained as well, including the refusal of a visa to a DPKO Africa Division Senior Political Affairs Officer of Canadian nationality during his trip to the region during the week of June 4 (NOTE: Eritrean DPR Araya Desta claimed to DepPolCouns that the DPKO officer had been denied a visa on procedural grounds because his application was filed in Khartoum vice New York. END NOTE). Annabi reported on a June 4 incident involving an UNMEE patrol stopped at gunpoint by Eritrean Defense Forces (EDF) and a June 5 incident in which an EDF officer threatened UNMEE with "serious action" if the Mission did not expeditiously "compensate" an EDF soldier injured during an accident with an UNMEE vehicle. Annabi expressed concern over continued EDF troop and militia rotations and movement of IDPs into the TSZ. A/SYG Annabi reported that Ethiopian Armed Forces planned to conduct tactical military training exercises in Sector West from June 11-17, coinciding with the UNSC's visit to the region.

¶10. (C) Despite a May 31 letter from the EEBC President reminding the parties of the looming November deadline and

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urging their re-engagement with the Commission, Annabi saw little prospect for resolving the border dispute. He cited June 5 comments by Ethiopian State Minister for Foreign Affairs Tekada blaming the inability to proceed on demarcation on Eritrea's restrictions on UNMEE and its violation of the TSZ. Annabi considered that even the June 8 letter from Ethiopian FM Seyoum to the Security Council President, in which Ethiopia accepted the EEBC delimitation decision without precondition, was nonetheless fraught with conditions, including a demand that Eritrea restore the integrity of the TSZ and UNMEE's freedom of movement. Annabi assured that the UN would continue to assess the impact and implications of the November deadline on the ground and the likely scenarios before and beyond November if the current stalemate persisted. Annabi appealed to the Council on its Mission to the region to encourage both leaders to re-confirm their commitment to the Algiers Agreements, especially the cease-fire; to exercise restraint; to restore TSZ integrity; to resume MCC activity; and to cooperate with UNMEE.

¶11. (C) Italian DPR Mantovani challenged Annabi's assessment of the June 8 letter, saying that the "ball was now in the Council's court" to respond to Ethiopia's statement that it accepted the EEBC decision without precondition. UK PolMinCouns Johnston supported Mantovani's argument, saying that if the Ethiopian Government were serious, then this would represent "a huge step forward." Annabi did not back down, however, stating that despite rhetoric making it seem like both sides were ready for demarcation, "there is always a 'but,'" and he insisted that the sides retained their "two fundamentally irreconcilable positions."

COMMENT

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¶12. (C) There is a general sense among Council Members, the UN and key partners that the international community would be well served to plan ahead for what may come in November. Members, at least preliminarily, seem to favor a six-month extension of UNMEE's mandate come July to accommodate whatever may happen on demarcation after that time. There

are no clear plans emerging on how to engage the parties ahead of November, and Norway seems reluctant to come out in front on this issue, especially since the information it receives from Asmara is not radically different from the rhetoric Asmara expresses in the media.

¶113. (C) To avoid having dubious interlocutors step in to fill the mediation gap (specifically Sudan and Libya), it would make sense to bring on a non-Western player, perhaps the AU, despite Eritrea's objections to its authority. Getting the AU involved in conflict prevention might serve to detract from the peacekeeping failures it is suffering but would involve considerable confidence-building with the Eritrean Government. Perhaps a meeting in a neutral location between AU Commission Chair Konare and Eritrean President Isaias could help to move the process forward. END COMMENT.

KHALILZAD